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Stewardship Sunday
11 14 10
First Pres Owasso

Thank God for Real Life
1 Timothy 6:6-19

Yesterday I was helping with a presbytery seminar for church professionals and their spouses on taking care of body, mind, and soul, called *Blessed Connections*— It examined four areas of our lives: *work, health, spiritual growth, and finances*. I was humbled in each area, learning something new, Asking God to help me do better, that I might become a healthier person.

And I realized—this is what *stewardship* is all about, *Taking care* of what God has given us—which includes Our work, our health, our spiritual growth, and our finances.

When it comes to finances, stewardship is not just about someone asking you for money, And you saying yes. It's so much bigger than that.

It's also about knowing where you place your *hope and trust*, Why you spend *what and why* you spend, *what and why* you give. I have to confess I come up short just like everyone else.... I bought some clothes last week that I didn't need, I only wanted. I have everything that I need. I just thought they were cute, and worse yet I thought: no one else is going to buy me anything pretty. And here's why it's so wrong. I am in debt up past my ears. I shouldn't be buying. In fact on the side I'm doing extra pastoral work, selling things I don't need, and things I make to earn more money for our family. Why would I buy this thinking that I needed it because I don't have children or a husband who can buy me Christmas presents this year? Instead I should just take a moment to be sad about that, pray about it, and let God fill up that little bit of sadness, not some clothes.

We all (I think) do things like this, spending for all the wrong reasons, whether it's remodeling part of the house, buying a new car, getting new clothes or golf clubs, sports tickets, or club memberships.

Many times they are not necessarily things that we need as much as they are things that we want....and **cannot** afford, or **should** not afford, because we should be giving it elsewhere.

When was the last time you made an **impulse** purchase?
Or when have you decided that a want was really a **need**....
and deep down inside there might have been something else going on in your life altogether?

Ever 'needed' something—clothes, food, drink--- because you were **stressed**?

I believe we all try this way of living life—even the most frugal among us—
at times trying to fill little holes in our hearts, little bits of emptiness, or sadness,
or ambitions, or keeping up appearances---
and it's not living **real life**, the great life God has planned for us.

You know what God says about our lives in Jeremiah 29:11?
For I know the plans I have for you says the Lord, plans for good and not for evil,
plans to give you a future **with hope**.

I just love our message today from 1 Timothy, esp. the NIV version **about hope**:
*17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their **hope in God**, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

Hope in God—because **God is certain**, money is not.

We all know this in the recession.

One day your hard earned money can be in a retirement account,
the next day it can be gone.

One day you can have a job, the next day you can be laid off or take a pay cut.

One day you can have a house full of belongings, the next moment it can go up in flames or a tornado.

To **hope in God**, not money, or those little things we want or think we need,
To be rich in doing what's right, in being generous, in sharing
(instead of trying to fill our hearts with stuff)
this is taking hold of the life that is really life.

The book of Hebrews addresses the issue this way: "*Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for God has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you."* [Heb. 13:5]

Nowhere in scripture does it say that money or worldly goods are a **bad** thing. It's the **love** of what we have, or what we want, that turns into a bad thing, and keeps us from living a really good life with God. It's when our **focus** is on our stuff then we are not really living.

Note what I just said.

This is the **polar opposite** to what the world says.

The world says real living is when you have more stuff.

Consequently we are a nation in **more debt** than ever before, nearly everyone has a credit card, even some of the youngest college or high schoolers who hear messages like

Visa its where you want to be' "there's always more to discover with **Discover** card', or '**American Express**-don't leave home without it'.

We're told things like 'you deserve it' when it comes to buying just about anything and everything!

Our children are literally bombarded with the message that they **NEED stuff!**

Of course we focus on what we have, and what we want, and what we think we need!

And ironically that's when our **real lives stop**,

because we stop being **connected** to God in the ways that we should be.

It's kind of like all that stuff pulls on the **electric cord** between us and God

until we finally get **unplugged**, and we're no longer getting our power from God.

We're not getting power anywhere, we just '**think**' **we're powerful** from our stuff.

When it's really just slowly killing us.

Real life is about something entirely different.

It's about placing our **hope in God**.

When it comes to our money and our 'stuff'....Paul says 3 things in 1 Timothy

It's about doing what's **right**.

It's about giving **generously**.

It's about **sharing** what we have.

Basically it's about **following Jesus Christ**---loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves.

Paul said this in Philippians: "... *I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" [Phil.4:11-13]

Hope in **God**, not what we have.

For anything we have is uncertain, but God is always here for us.

And how do we live the real life?

Doing what's ***right, giving, and sharing.***

That's good stewardship right there—doing what's ***right, giving, and sharing.***

When we do these things we can be for certain that God will use our gifts for good.

That lives will be changed by what we do, and give, and how we share.

My prayer is that you will prayerfully consider

Those ways that you deal with the money and blessings in your life,

And ask God what percentage of that to give back next year.

And bring that to the front before our offering time today.

That ***doing, giving, and sharing*** is not just placing your ***hope*** in God,

It is ***taking hold*** of the life that really is life. Amen.